

Dazzling Inter stun Barca

Champions' attitude irks Mourinho

AFP, Milan



Inter Milan produced a stunning performance to beat holders Barcelona 3-1 in the Champions League semifinal, first leg at the San Siro on Tuesday.

Goals from Wesley Sneijder, Maicon and Diego Milito extinguished Pedro's opener for Barca and sent the nerazzurri faithful into raptures ahead of next week's second leg at the Camp Nou.

It was a tactical masterclass from Jose Mourinho as his team wiped out memories of the footballing lessons Barca gave them in the group stages back in September and November.

Mourinho showed he wasn't messing around before kick-off by picking an attacking line-up with three forwards plus playmaker Sneijder in midfield and from the off they demonstrated a willingness to take on the champions.

"I don't want to make excuses. We did not play with enough passion."
- Pep Guardiola

It was they who created the first clear-cut chance on 18 minutes as Samuel Eto'o curled a left-footer from outside the area that Victor Valdes failed to hold but Diego Milito fired the rebound straight across the face of goal.

Inter were looking relaxed

Inter Milan 3 - 1 Barcelona
Sneijder 30' Pedro 19'
Maicon 48' Milito 61'

INTER MILAN (4-2-1-3): Julio Cesar-Maicon (C Chivu, 73min), W Samuel, Lucio, J Zanetti - S Eto'o, D Milito (M Balotelli, 75), G Pandev (D Stankovic, 56)

BARCELONA (4-3-3): VValdes - D Alves, C Puyol, G Pique, Maxwell - Xavi Hernandez, S Busquets, S Keita - L Messi, Z Ibrahimovic (E Abidal, 72), Pedro Rodriguez

ATTENDANCE: 83,000

Messi leaves Maicon tooth-less

SOCERNET

Inter Milan goal-scorer Maicon had his night soured when he lost a tooth in an accidental collision with Lionel Messi in his side's 3-1 victory over Barcelona on Tuesday.

Brazilian wingback Maicon got the go-ahead goal in the second half of the Champions League semifinal first leg but he left the field on a stretcher after a later incident in his own penalty area that saw his tooth visibly flying through the air.

Messi was jumping to head the ball as Maicon retreated on his blindside, and the Barcelona star's left shoulder launched straight into Maicon's face, leaving him strewn across the pitch.

Inter were looking relaxed

and confident but a minute later they fell behind through some dreadful defending.

Former Inter left-back Maxwell ran far too easily down the left past three non-challenges, reaching the byline where he pulled the ball back and with Inter's defenders preoccupied by Zlatan Ibrahimovic in the centre, Pedro came in off the right flank to drill the ball home from 15 yards.

The hosts kept going about their task, though, and Sneijder slid a lovely pass into Milito in the inside left channel but again he dragged his shot just past the far post.

Yet on the half hour mark Inter got the equaliser they deserved as Maicon played Eto'o down the right, he pulled the ball back into the middle and Milito took it off Goran Pandev's foot but then fed it

"Why can Barcelona not act like champions and accept they lost to a team that played better?"
- Jose Mourinho

on to the unmarked Sneijder at the back post for a right-footed finish inside Valdes's near upright.

In that first half Barca had enjoyed almost 65 percent of the possession - but Inter were showing that their coach's assertion after the pair met in the group stages that you can



Inter Milan fullback Maicon (R) scores the second goal past Barcelona goalkeeper Victor Valdes during their Champions League semifinal at San Siro on Tuesday.

play well without the ball, certainly rang true.

Mourinho had also said before kick-off that Barca were as good as they were back then but that Inter were much improved and their display bore that out.

Inter's first half had been impressive but they started the second at a canter with Pandev shedding off three players in midfield and then playing Milito behind the backline, the Argentine pulling the ball back for the charging Maicon to prod home his

KEY STATS

	Inter	Barcelona
Shots on target	5	7
Corners	2	4
Possession	32%	68%
Yellow Cards	2	5

second goal in successive games, just three minutes in.

Messi finally woke up and got his first shot off on 53 minutes but Julio Cesar parried it and the Brazilian stop-

per had to be alert moments later to block a close-range Sergio Busquets header from a corner, although the Spaniard should have scored.

But Barca could not handle

Inter's attacking flair and on 61 minutes Eto'o crossed from the right and Sneijder's poor header bounced up for Milito, arriving at the back post, to nod home.

Julio Cesar stood tall again 11 minutes from time as he punched away a crisp Messi free-kick.

Barca took total possession of the ball in the closing stages and Inter survived one scramble in the box as Lucio blocked Gerard Pique's prod from a tight angle on the line.

SOCERNET

Jose Mourinho hailed Inter Milan for their resilience and claimed they were no longer "a small Champions League club" after they beat holders Barcelona 3-1 at the San Siro.

However, the Inter coach also blasted Barcelona and accused them of trying to crowd around the official after the final whistle because of a Dani Alves penalty appeal.

"Obviously beating Barcelona is not easy, neither is scoring or defending against them. We won and deserved it. Clearly it's a result beforehand we would've been happy with," he said to TV station RAI.

"After the match I saw some things in the players' tunnel that show me what it is I must expect next week.

"I saw the Barcelona players trying to put pressure on the referee. My only comment was that their players have short memories, but 'my' Chelsea players last season were complaining after an historically bad refereeing performance by Ovrebø.

"Why can Barcelona not act like champions and accept they lost on the night to a team that played better?"

Mourinho praised his side for their fightback and hailed their "extraordinary campaign".

"Inter have gone from being a small Champions League club to one that can deservedly beat Barcelona and challenge to go all the way.

The Inter players deserve all the praise in the world. Whatever happens, the fans will never forget the journey we have made and the effort everyone put in."

IN BRIEF

We didn't play with passion: Pep

SOCERNET

Barcelona boss Pep Guardiola refused to blame his side's arduous coach journey to Milan for their disappointing 3-1 defeat in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal at the San Siro.

"I don't want to make excuses," he told Sky Sports. "It was a long trip, that is true, but this is the semifinals of the Champions League and the desire to reach the final should be important enough. It's okay, though, this happens."

"We started with a goal but we didn't play enough football in the first half," said Guardiola. "We didn't move the ball with passion. We played against a good team under difficult circumstances, but there is one game left and we are going to try."

Guardiola warned Inter Milan that the tie is far from over, with Barcelona set to go in search of the two goals they need to book a final berth in Madrid.

Teammates take a dig at Balotelli

THE GUARDIAN

Inter Milan striker Mario Balotelli has been criticised by his teammates after throwing his shirt to the ground at the end of his team's 3-1 win over Barcelona in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal.

Despite the win Balotelli, who was given a less than supportive welcome by home fans when introduced in the 75th minute at San Siro, was in no mood to celebrate. Instead, having already gestured to the crowd after shooting wide, the 19-year-old threw his jersey to the turf and marched angrily towards the tunnel at full-time.

"He's like a child. I'm a father of three kids and you can't take him by the collar, too," said the Inter midfielder Dejan Stankovic, a fellow substitute last night. "He suffered, but I've suffered too with the fans. He's reacted poorly, but he's still got time."

Inter's captain, Javier Zanetti, added: "[I am] disappointed that a celebration was ruined with something like this. If the fans whistle at him he's got to understand that it could depend on a lot of different things. We've always stood by him."

The Martians of Inter!

SOCERNET



The Italian press hailed Inter Milan as Martians following their "out of this world" 3-1 victory against Barcelona in the Champions League semifinal first leg at San Siro on Tuesday night.

Gazzetta dello Sport referred to Barca's exceptional forward Lionel Messi as coming from Mars in the build up to the match but following the surprise result the front page declared: "Mega Inter: We are the Martians."

The Milan-based newspaper highlighted Inter's fighting spirit as they came from behind to triumph and continue their unbeaten home record in all competitions this campaign.

"Barack Obama promised Mars within 30 years," wrote Gazzetta's Luigi Garlando. "He'll be late - Inter disembarked there yesterday. If Barcelona are Martians, [Jose] Mourinho's team deserve citizenship of the same planet."

Rome's sport-based newspaper Corriere dello Sport also paid tribute to Inter's play and reckons the Nerazzurri have one foot in next month's

Champions League final, which will be played in Madrid.

"Legend Inter," was Corriere's headline. "A wonderful 3-1 win over world champions Barcelona. The Champions League final is closer."

Tuesday night's victory was



The front page of Italian daily Gazzetta dello Sport reads "Mega Inter: We are the Martians" following Inter Milan's win over Barcelona in their Champions League semifinal. In the run up to the match the paper had hailed Barca's star as "Martian Messi," but this time dedicated the epithet to the home side.

not without its controversy, however, with teenage substitute Mario Balotelli throwing his shirt to the ground at the end of the game and marching angrily towards the tunnel after being given a less than supportive welcome by the home fans.

The 19-year-old striker has

had a fractious relationship with Mourinho this season and last month infuriated his coach by wearing an AC Milan jersey on an Italian television show.

Gazzetta wrote: "Balotelli ruins the party." Turin-based Tuttosport also criticised Balotelli. "Inter (put on) show

"There's still a month and a half to go before we get to work and I think there is time for pretty much everyone to be fine," said the former Real Madrid coach, who added that injuries were "part and parcel of things for this stage of the season. I think almost everyone will get there in good shape."

But he added that "we can't go with five or six men in cotton wool" and so "should someone not make it, there are some great guys waiting in the wings".

On Monday Torres said he felt sure he would recover from knee surgery in time for the World Cup finals in South Africa.

"The World Cup is the most important thing right now. It has been four years of waiting and if the schedule for my recovery goes according to plan I do not plan to miss it," the 26-year-old wrote on his official website, following surgery on a torn cartilage in his right knee in Barcelona on Sunday.

National newspaper La Repubblica believe the teenager will leave at the end of the season and claimed he marred the win. They said: "Inter three goals against Barcelona but it's a fracture with Balotelli."

Del Bosque stays upbeat

AFP, Madrid

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque said on Tuesday he was confident his squad would go to the World Cup in good shape despite fitness doubts over stars such as Liverpool forward Fernando Torres.

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Rolfes' WC dream fading

AFP, Berlin

Germany midfielder Simon Rolfes admitted Tuesday his World Cup dream is fading after struggling to regain his fitness after a knee injury.

The 28-year-old has won 21 caps for Germany, but a procedure to remove damaged cartilage from his knee has kept him out of football since January.

He is not expected to play again this season for Leverkusen set to conclude on May 8 and is currently working hard on rehabilitation.

"Most likely, the World Cup is out of my reach," said the Leverkusen captain on the www.dfb.de website.

"I have not given up hope and I am in contact with Joachim Loew (the national coach), but I don't think I will be there, which is a pity."

Rolfes last played for Germany in the 1-0 win over Russia last October which took the national side to the World Cup finals in June where they will play Australia, Ghana and Serbia in Group D.

Germany play World Cup warm-ups against Malta on May 13, Hungary on May 29 and Bosnia-Herzegovina on June 3.

Scientist picks Germany

AFP, Berlin



A university professor has developed a mathematical formula which, he claims, shows Germany will win the 2010 World Cup in South Africa this June.

Germany face Australia, Serbia and Ghana in Group D, but Metin Tolan, a physics professor at the University of Dortmund, is convinced German captain Michael Ballack will be lifting the World Cup following the final on July 11.

The scientist has written a formula based on trigonometry which analyses all Germany's results from previous World Cups and predicts a winner for this year's tournament.

Having won the World Cup three times, in 1954, 1974 and 1990, Germany's average finishing place at previous tournaments is 3.7 and Tolan says his formula shows this will be Germany's year to lift the trophy.

"It is very simple, all my calculations prove this," he told Germany magazine "Zeit Wissen".

"The last time we won the World Cup was back in 1990 and there have been four tournaments since,"

Adler could miss trip to SA

AFP, Berlin

Germany's first-choice goalkeeper Rene Adler could be in danger of missing June's World Cup after breaking a rib in a Bundesliga match last weekend, it was reported here on Tuesday.

The 25-year-old Bayer Leverkusen star is German coach Joachim Loew's first-choice goalkeeper, but broke a rib in last Saturday's 2-1 defeat to Stuttgart.

The injury throws his World Cup place into question with the tournament set to start on June 11, but Adler is staying optimistic.

"The doctors say the fracture is expected to heal pretty quickly, so I am cautiously optimistic," said Adler, who is set to miss Saturday's Bundesliga clash against Hannover, in a Leverkusen press release.

explained Tolan.

"The average finishing place of the Germany team is 3.7 and the German team wins the title every fourth or fifth World Cup.

"Nobody can beat us this year and you can already put the champagne on ice." Tolan already predicted Germany would win the last World Cup, which they hosted in 2006, but unfortunately for his theory, the home nation was beaten by eventual winners Italy in the semifinals.

"My formula gave the winner for the following World Cup, this is why it works this time for sure," he explained undeterred after Jurgen Klinsmann's side beat Portugal 3-1 to finish third at the last World Cup.

But Tolan's equations could also help Germany's arch-rivals England, who were dumped out of the last World Cup after being beaten on penalties by Portugal, as Fabio Capello's side have a history of struggling with spot-kicks.

"The weakest kicker should take the first penalty, then the second-weakest and so on," he said.

"Then you have the greatest chance of scoring as many goals as possible."

Benzema under probe

Football

AFP, Paris

Police will question French footballer Karim Benzema over prostitution involving a minor, an official said Wednesday, making him the third star of France's national team to be named in the scandal.

The judicial official, speaking on condition of anonymity under standard French practice, said a prostitute had told investigators she had sex with Real Madrid striker Benzema in 2008 when she was 16.

In France a person under 18 is considered a minor. Sex with a prostitute under 18 carries a jail term of up to three years and a fine of 45,000 euros (60,000 dollars).

The woman said she also had relations with Benzema's France team mate Franck Ribery in 2009, when she was 17 but told him she was over 18, the source said.

A judicial official on Monday named Ribery in the case but said the Bayern Munich winger claimed he did not know she was a minor.

The source said Ribery told police he had sexual relations with her and paid for her to visit him in Germany but denied paying her a direct sum for sex.

when she was 18, and that he was surprised when she asked him to pay her several hundred euros afterwards.

Govou's lawyer Thierry Braillard insisted Sunday that Govou "is not linked either closely or remotely to any kind of prostitution network".

None of the players has so far been charged in the case, which centres on a suspected prostitution network at a Paris night club frequented by certain French internationals. A judge must decide whether charges are brought.

"Possible criminal proceedings in a case like this one depend on the client's knowledge or awareness that the relationship involves a minor," an official said.

The manager of the club and three others including a waiter have been charged in the case and are in custody.

The police inquiry could not have come at a worse time for French coach Raymond Domenech and his team just 50 days before the start of the World Cup in South Africa, at which the three players are expected to play for France.

The French football team's image was already tarnished after they beat Ireland in the qualifying stages only with the help of an illegal handball by striker Thierry Henry.

"This is yet another blow for the French team," a source at the French Football Federation, who wished to remain anonymous, told AFP after Ribery was named in the scandal.

Fergie anoints Moyes

Football

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson is reported to have anointed David Moyes as his chosen successor as manager of Manchester United in a snub to Jose Mourinho's aspirations of stepping into the Old Trafford hotseat.

A flurry of reports this week have claimed that Ferguson, who turns 69 on December 31, has told United's board that he will retire at the end of next season.

Mourinho, who is on the verge of taking Inter Milan to the Champions League final after Tuesday's 3-1 semifinal first leg win over Barcelona, is the bookmakers favourite to take over.

According to The Sun however, Ferguson believes that his fellow Scot Moyes, who is widely admired for his achievements at Everton on a tight budget, would be a better choice for United.

Ferguson has often said that he is fond of Mourinho and the Portuguese's phenomenal record in charge of FC Porto, Chelsea and now Inter undoubtedly makes him an extremely strong candidate for a job he may have been talking about when he spoke recently of his desire to return to England.

But United directors including Sir Bobby Charlton reportedly harbour reservations related to Mourinho's ability to generate controversy, which may bolster the chances of Moyes being asked to take over.

he also combines an apparently abrasive public persona with an ability to coax the best out of players drawn from a broad range of cultures and backgrounds.

Ferguson may be contemplating retirement, but he still has his eye on United's long-term future and the Scot believes he has a promising crop of young players in the club's title-winning reserve team.

Coached by Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Warren Joyce, the United second string secured the trophy for the first time in four years after Liverpool lost to Everton on Tuesday evening.

Ferguson particularly highlighted the contribution of Northern Ireland Under-21 midfielders Oliver Norwood and Corry Evans. "Some of the players have done very well," Ferguson said. "For example, in the 1-0 win against Liverpool, the back four were absolutely brilliant, they really did well."

"One or two younger players are developing quite well. Gabriel Obertan scored an unbelievable goal."

"Oliver Norwood and Corry Evans do really well and have a good attitude towards the game. That's an important thing and Ole and Warren have maintained that attitude right through the team."

Ferguson added: "I'd like to say congratulations to Ole and Warren. They've done a great job. Whenever we've appointed a new reserve team coach, I've always explained to them what a difficult job it is because it's subject to what I need."

"I may pull out three or four players from a training session or I might say, 'these players can't play for you on Thursday because they're on standby for me on Saturday'."